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FRANCIS CHIAPPA: My name is Francis Chiappa and I'm speaking on behalf of the Cleveland Peace Action, the local chapter Peace Action, a national grassroots organization working for peace and disarmament. Our concerns are primarily in the area of nuclear and conventional weaponry and military spending. But we felt it necessary to comment on the Yucca Mountain project, in part, because some of the waste to be buried there is a product of nuclear weapons production. The nature of the various materials proposed for interment at Yucca Mountain is testimony to the inextricable relationship between nuclear weapons and nuclear power. Where there is nuclear power, weapons grade materials may be produced. The old slogan notwithstanding, there are "no atoms for peace." To quote from the EIS, high-level radioactive waste is primarily waste that resulted from the chemical extraction of weapons-useable materials from spent nuclear fuel.

1 Now we do appreciate the Department of Energy's attempt to thoughtfully and carefully devise a long-range plan for the disposal of this waste. While we believe there are major problems with the Yucca Mountain project, we are even more worried about the disposal of nuclear wastes in many other nations. In countries lacking democratic traditions, there will be no environmental impact statements, no public hearings, no openness in the process for sighting and burial. Worldwide, there will be hundreds of thousands of metric tons to be disposed of in coming decades.

Many nations will not do this safely and effectively. Many people will die and their land will be poisoned, for all practical considerations, forever. This makes the continued development of nuclear power, as well as nuclear weapons, seem reckless and irresponsible. Added to these concerns is the prospect that spent nuclear fuels can be reprocessed into weapons-usable materials. Thus nuclear power is likely to fuel proliferation of nuclear weapons around the globe. Pandora's box has been opened. The Yucca Mountain project is an attempt to close the box. It's better than we anticipate elsewhere, but is not without problems.

2 One of our concerns for the Yucca Mountain project is the effect buried wastes could have over the very long periods, during which they will remain radioactive. The EIS uses two time frames of analysis. Short-term, the next hundred years and long-term, the next 10,000 years. In our fast paced society, where short-term often means the next three months, or the next year, 10,000 years seems an absurdly long time. But consider the half-life of Plutonium 239, one of the elements proposed for burial. It has a radioactive half-life of 24,360 years. After a mere 10,000 years, the plutonium in the repository would be about 80 percent as dangerous as when it was first buried. After 100,000 years, ten times longer than the long-term effects analyzed in the EIS, one-sixteenth of the radioactivity will remain. This is quite a lot considering that plutonium is the most deadly substance known where one particle lodged in the lungs is almost certain to result in cancer. We find it incredible that the EIS does not discuss the radioactive half-life of elements to be buried at Yucca Mountain. If it had been discussed, it would beg the question about what long-term really means. And our answer we would propose is much longer than 10,000 years.

What will be left of America in 10,000 years? Will the U.S. Government survive? What about the State of Nevada? Who will be here to reap the deadly harvest of the seeds sown in

2
continued

Yucca Mountain? 100,000 years may seem inconceivable but at the end of that period significant radioactivity would continue to emit inside the mountain. With some luck it would remain contained there. Consider that in 100,000 years the North American continent is likely to drift 2.5 kilometers or 1.5 miles from its present location. I ask with some seriousness, where will Yucca Mountain be by then? And what will happen to the storage canisters and the deadly nuclear waste within them? The EIS estimates the probability of volcanic disruption at one in 7,000, that's over 10,000 years. No doubt the probability over 100,000 years would be far greater, perhaps one in 700, perhaps more than that. 100,000 years may seem inconceivable, but the EIS must make some attempt to conceive it, to examine the truly long-term consequences of the burial of this waste.

3

A little comment about Indian claims to the land. The Ruby Valley Treaty gives the Yucca Mountain region to the use of the Western Shoshone Tribe. And there has been some dispute over this land. Nuclear weapons nations of the world made a habit of conducting nuclear weapons tests on the lands of indigenous people. And as far as we know, no nuclear tests have ever been conducted on land that was not expropriated from native people. The economic project follows this tradition -- this dubious tradition of environmental racism. And it uses the land for a Treaty for a purpose which could have never been conceived by the signers of the Treaty in 1863. The EIS contains at least one remark smacking of racism. The summary states that of Native American people, they believe that water, animals, plants and so on, are dependent on each other for existence. The use of the word "they" seeks to differentiate these people from the mainstream of American Society, whose beliefs are presumed rational, modern, and scientific. The EIS implies that Indian people's beliefs about the land are magical and irrational. Western Shoshone spiritual leader Corbin Harney has often invoked the mantra: "One earth, one water, one air." This amounts actually to a succinct statement of an environmental sensibility, which has swept this nations since the early 1970's. And it is more and more well grounded in scientific theory, which attests to the interconnectedness of all things in this biosphere of ours. This land should be given back to the stewardship of the Western Shoshone people. There will be some further later comments in the program from Marji Edguer to complete these actions on -- comments on the project.